



Writing (and reading) journal articles for professional development:

APMC – A great place to start



LINDA MARSHALL
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provide some advice
for budding APMC
authors. It may seem a
daunting process but it
well worth the effort.

As new editors of APMC, we are very grateful to all the teachers, pre-service teachers and mathematics educators who have written, and continue to write articles for consideration in this journal. However, this article is intended to assist people who have never written for a journal, or who perhaps have never even thought about doing so. It can be a bit daunting when you first put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboards), so we thought we would put together some advice to make it a little easier for you.

What to write about?

The first thing to realise is that what is important to you when teaching mathematics is likely to be important to other teachers too. Your voice is valuable; and you may just make a difference to other teachers who want to try something they had not thought of before. Remember, you can always start by writing a short article—two or three pages may be enough. You might want to describe something you have tried in a classroom and how it worked; or you might want to try an activity that you have read about in APMC, and let a broader audience know how it went. It is always good to include samples of children's work, or their comments on your activity.

Where to start?

So where do you start? First, decide on the topic for your article, and start gathering some information. You might like to look at a new idea that no one else has written about or extend on an idea about which you have read, but with a different emphasis; or it may be ideas on how to start an activity, what equipment you will need to gather, how you will organise the class, how the children will record their findings, how you will assess whether any learning has taken place, etc. You might want to take extra notes about some of the children's comments/opinions, or photograph them working, or collect some samples of their work. (See below for suggestions about how to gain permission to use this information.)

What has been done already?

It may be useful to look at what has already been written on the topic you have chosen. Do a bit of background reading, and see what is out there. Past APMC articles are a good starting point. Be discriminating; and remember, Google may not be the best source for ideas. However, you may wish to try Google Scholar.

Plagiarism, where an idea from another person is used and not credited, is frowned upon. However, where possible, it does help to refer to previous articles on similar topics. You do not need to try to re-write the article, or even describe it fully; just note the main idea that is relevant to your article. Make a brief summary of the aspects that are relevant to your article, and then add a comment such as, "See xxxx (year of publication) for the original article". Make sure you let the readers know the source of your information. The citation in the text need only mention the authors' names and the date of publication, however, at the end of the article, full details such as the name of the journal or the book and the publishers will be required so make

a careful record when researching the article.

Also, when citing previous articles, it is better if they are recent. Unless they are really famous or important articles, try to have no citations that are more than 10 years old. This gives your article currency and recency. For example, curriculum-related references become dated when there is a change of curriculum such as the change to the Australian Curriculum.

Who will read this paper?

You need to be aware of the audience for APMC. Readers of APMC are primary school teachers, pre-service teachers and teacher education lecturers. As the audience is largely Australian, links to the Australian Curriculum would be useful. This would not detract from a growing international perspective for the journal.

What will be in the paper?

Before sending off an article for publication, let some colleagues read it and offer constructive criticism. Give them a specific job: some colleagues may look at the article through a grammar lens, others may consider the mathematics and still others the readability. Once an article is sent to APMC (see the contents page for details of where to send articles), wait for confirmation that it has been received and please be patient.

What happens after the paper is submitted?

APMC is a double-blind-refereed publication, which means that each article we receive has the author's name and details removed, and is then sent to at least two reviewers for their comments and opinions. The reviewers are people identified by the editors as having expertise in the field of the paper; they

might be mathematics educators or people who work in similar environments. Please do not feel discouraged if your article is not published in its original form. If the reviewers believe the article has merit, they will offer suggestions on how to make amendments that clarify or improve the original submission. These comments are passed back to the authors via the APMC editors, with the reviewers' names removed, and the authors are asked to make changes that reflect the suggestions. Sometimes, reviewers will make suggestions as to how to improve an article, and recommend that, once these have been actioned, the article be published. Sometimes, one of the reviewers may review an article and believe that for some reason the article is not suitable for publication. In these cases, a third reviewer may be sought; but ultimately, the journal editors have the final option as to whether the article goes through to publication. Unfortunately, sometimes both reviewers reject a paper for whatever reason.

Sometimes it may take quite a long time for an accepted article to go through to publication, even 6 to 9 months. It may be that there is more than one article on a similar topic, and so yours may be held back until the others are ready. Now and again, focus issues of APMC are published, and an article may be held until that takes place.

Please do not be offended if your article is rejected. Remember that many famous authors have experienced rejection—even authors as famous as J. K. Rawlins! It may be that your paper does not quite fit the journal. In these cases, (anonymous) feedback from the reviewers will still be sent. In this circumstance, you could consider re-writing the article for a more appropriate journal.

When you have finished writing

It is often a good idea to ask a friend or supportive colleague to check through your

article before you send it for consideration. They may find sections that need further clarification or illustration. Sometimes we are too close to our own work, and assume the readers know what we are talking about; but to a fresh pair of eyes, this may not be the case, and you can find out what needs to be explained further. Swan (1997) suggested a checklist of four items for your colleague to check:

- Proof-read (i.e., look for typos and grammatical errors, free of discriminatory language and cultural bias)
- Consider the audience—will this appeal to others?
- Is the article clear and simple or verbose?
- Is the article free of jargon or acronyms familiar only to small audiences? Remember APMC is a national journal, so watch using terms familiar only to teachers in your state.

Now, the technical stuff

There are many other details that need to be considered when writing an article for this, or any other journal. These include:

- use and labelling of tables and/or figures
- quality of photographs
- permission to use photographs of students or their work
- author warranties
- black and white (two coloured) nature of the journal
- use (in fact, non-use) of clip art
- culturally sensitive issues
- length of article
- references (in-text and end-text)
- etiquette
- your contact details
- your (recent) photo.

Use of labelling of tables and/or figures

A table is made up of columns and rows, and is used to summarise some information; a figure is usually a diagram, drawing or

photograph. It is often useful to break up articles with the appropriate use of tables and/or figures. When doing so, make sure that the tables and/or figures are clearly explained within the article. Of course, when using tables and/or figures, they need to be numerically designated; for example, you may say, “One group of students recorded their work using diagrams, as in Figure 2 below”. Each table or figure should be labelled with an appropriate caption.

Quality of photographs

As this is a printed glossy publication, photographs need to be of a fairly high resolution. This is the case whether the photos are to illustrate your article, or photos of the author/s. It is preferable to use images (TIFF, PNG or high quality JPEG) of at least 300 dpi (dots per inch)—much higher quality than most images found on websites, which tend to be about 72 dpi. (Also, do not make the mistake of thinking that because an image is on the Web, that copyright does not apply!)

Permission to use photographs of students or their work

The use of photographs of students and their work often helps clarify points made in an article, and brings life and realism to your work. However, it is important to make sure that you have written permission from students and their parents before you use their photographs in your article. Equally, you will need their permission to publish any of their work samples.

Author warranty

Before an article can be published, authors must sign a warranty form. This form outlines a number of conditions of publication, including that the paper is your own work, and that all statements made in it are true. This form can be obtained from the AAMT website, or if it is not sent in with the original version of your paper, the editors will email

a copy for you to sign and return. If there is more than one author, each author will need to sign the form.

Black and white nature of the journal

All issues of APMC are printed in ‘two colours’: black and another colour (e.g., blue, red, etc.) on white paper. Unfortunately, other than the covers, we cannot publish photographs and drawings in full colour. We still would prefer you to attach the photos, etc. in colour (see quality, above). If your article needs to be illustrated in colour, the best way would be to add labels or descriptions for your illustrations in writing (and avoid statements such as, “...are shown on the graph in red”). Occasionally a photograph used to enhance an article will be used on the front cover of the journal; and that would appear in full colour.

Use (in fact, non-use) of clip art

There are several reasons why we prefer not to use clip art in the journal. There is a copyright issue, whereby clip art licences do not allow for their use in this sort of publication. Also, many of the pictures are of dubious quality, using cliché images or are over-used elsewhere.

Culturally sensitive issues

If you are describing or using photographs of artefacts of a culturally-sensitive nature, for example, Indigenous artefacts, you need to be aware that there may be issues beyond our control that mean that we cannot publish them. It may be that they are only to be seen by males, or there may be copyright issues regarding the decoration of the artefacts. Please check whether special permission is needed for their inclusion in the journal.

Length of article

The general rule is that articles are to be less than 2000 words in length. If you have a shorter paper that you wish to submit for publication, it may well be accepted. If your

article is much longer than 2000 words, it may be that you will be asked to trim it down; or alternatively, the reviewers or editors may feel the need to reduce the paper. There may be rare exceptions to this, but generally, shorter is better.

In-text and end-text references

If you cite another author's work, you need to reference the author within the article (in-text), using surname/s and year of publication, and again in the reference list at the end of the article. All references are based on the American Psychological Association (APA) rules. You could look at other articles in APMC to see how they have been referenced. Here are some examples of end-text references:

Book:

Bana, J., Marshall, L., & Swan, P. (2005). *Maths terms and tables*. Perth, WA: Journey Australia & R.I.C. Publications.

Journal:

Swan, P. (1997). Writing for journals: An avenue for professional development. *Australian Primary Mathematics Classroom*, 2(2), 22–24.

Web:

Swan, P. (n.d.). *Mathematical language*. Retrieved 12 July 2011 from http://members.iinet.net.au/~markobri/Paul_Swan/Articles/Mathematical_Language.pdf

Etiquette

Once you have put a lot of effort into writing your article, it might be tempting to send it to more than one journal—please do not. Choose one (preferable APMC) and

wait for a reply. If the article is rejected, it may be reworked and resubmitted, or sent to another journal. Also, please make sure you inform people who may be involved in some way with your work before they get the surprise of being quoted or having their photo appear in your article.

Your contact details

You will need to include the name/s and institution/s of the author/s, the title of the paper, and contact details such as telephone, email and postal addresses. Finally, a recent passport style (head and shoulders) photograph of each of the authors will be required.

And finally...

Good luck with the task ahead. We look forward to receiving many more articles for inclusion in the Australian Primary Mathematics Classroom.

References

Swan, P. (1997). Writing for journals: An avenue for professional development. *Australian Primary Mathematics Classroom*, 2(2), 22–24.